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Geneva Arms Control Talks: Round IV

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Following is an address by Kenneth L. Adelman, Director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, before the National Press Club, Washington, D.C., January 14, 1986.

I am delighted to be here at the National Press Club this morning to have the opportunity to speak with you about the upcoming round of arms talks in Geneva.

Arms control, as you know, is a field in which public officials are continually asked to make predictions. Needless to say, our predictions are not always on the mark. I recall Churchill's response to a question on the most desirable qualification in a young man seeking office. "It is," he said, "the ability to foretell what is going to happen tomorrow, next week, next month, and next year. And to have the ability afterwards to explain why it didn't happen."

Nonetheless, I will try this morning to foretell, as concretely as I can, where we might see movement in the arms negotiations and, more importantly, what influences might operate either to facilitate or impede such movement.

Prospects for Progress

Surely we are in a better position today for real progress in arms control than we've been in years. This improved situation for arms control—and the current improvement in our relations with the Soviets overall—have occurred because of, and not in spite of, the President's resolution in arms control and national security policies over the past 5 years.

Basically, I see the coming round in Geneva—round IV—as a round of opportunity—one in which the Soviet negotiators should buckle down to the real work of arms control and implement what was agreed to at the summit, namely, that progress be made as quickly as possible where common ground exists between the United States and the Soviet Union. This was agreed at the summit to be 50% cuts in strategic arms and an interim agreement on intermediate-range nuclear weapons. In round IV, we seek to learn the Soviets' reaction to our new ideas, presented in each of the three areas of the talks during the final days of the previous round. And our negotiators will be elaborating on these November 1 proposals. Furthermore, they look forward to real give-and-take on the basis of these proposals.

The ball is in their court. The Soviets owe us a complete response. They owe it to everyone to get serious about making progress in arms control. They've been skirting around the central issues too long already.

I would note that the recent summit meeting delved into many key issues besides arms control. That is as it should be. It is important to remember that nuclear weapons are not the only things that divide us from the Soviet Union.

We desire progress in arms control. But we also wish to see progress in the regional conflicts in which the Soviets have a hand. We wish to see progress, however halting or inadequate it may prove to be, toward freedom for the Soviet people and for the captive peoples of the East bloc. These are not superficial concerns. They go to the very heart of the American-Soviet relationship.

The U.S.-Soviet Relationship

If we have been compelled to live with a competition in weapons in this century, it arises from the Soviet habit, even compulsion, of stirring the world's troubled waters. It is precisely because the Soviet Union has set itself as the main force opposing freedom around the world. The nuclear weapons that we have been forced to acquire over the years are the symptoms of this conflict, the inevitable response to this threat.

It is in this sense that President Reagan stated at the close of the recent summit, "The real report card on Geneva will not come in for months or even years, but we know the questions that must be answered." These questions are:

- Will we join together in sharply reducing offensive nuclear arms and moving to non-nuclear defensive systems to make this a safer world?

• Will we join together to help bring about a peaceful resolution of conflicts in Asia, Africa, and Central America so that the peoples there can freely determine their own destiny without outside interference?

• Will the cause of liberty be advanced, and will the treaties and agreements signed—past and future—be fulfilled?

To mute our concerns about these conflicts we have with the Soviet Union would be both a moral and a tactical error. It would be a moral error because it would undermine the very principles we stand for, our very reasons for being as a nation. It would be a tactical error because it would reveal us in negotiation to be irresolute and weak. And, as I've said, we're in a good position on arms control today precisely because of our past firmness.

Besides, it is a simple historical fact that Americans have always seen progress in arms control as part of an effort to improve the broad sweep of Soviet-American relations, as part of a broad movement toward reducing the level of aggression in the world as a whole. When the SALT II [strategic arms limitation talks] Treaty failed to gain Senate ratification in 1979, it was in large measure because a number of Senators had reservations about the treaty provisions; but the Carter Administration finally withdrew the treaty in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan—that is, in response to a regional conflict.

The Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)

In addition to expressing our concerns about regional conflicts and about human rights, the President took the opportunity at the summit to set forth in detail his vision of a future free from the shadow of nuclear apocalypse. Since the dawn of the nuclear age, we have taken two paths to deal with "the nuclear problem"—deterrence through offensive strength and arms control through negotiations. Despite our unilateral efforts to maintain deterrence and attempts to negotiate a stable nuclear balance at lower levels, the Soviets have shown a lack of restraint in both offensive and defensive programs and a generally unconstructive approach to arms negotiations. These Soviet actions, if not countered or corrected, will undermine deterrence.

While still—like his predecessors—pursuing the two paths of deterrence and arms control, President Reagan has added a third path. This President is the first to create hope, through SDI, of a future in which our security rests not upon the threat of nuclear retaliation but, rather, on the ability to defend against potential attack. If our research yields positive results, it offers the possibility of reversing the dangerous military trend by moving to a more stable basis for deterrence and providing new and compelling incentives to the Soviet Union to negotiate deep cuts in nuclear arsenals. If a new strategy based on effective defenses proves feasible, then our security, for the first time in the nuclear era, would not be held hostage to the threat of nuclear devastation, Soviet rationality, or the uncertain outcome of arms control talks.

If successful, we would hope that the Soviets would travel with us from a world dominated by weapons of mass destruction to a world secured by the technologies of defense. Even in the short run, SDI holds out the promise of improving deterrence by removing the capacity of the Soviets to benefit militarily from a first strike—something that we have long tried to do through arms control and, so far, failed.

Avoiding Miscalculation

Still, a legitimate question remains: what is the purpose of this kind of summit exchange? What good does it do to have President Reagan setting forth his positions and Mr. Gorbachev setting forth another set of positions, if the two leaders fundamentally disagree, as they did and as they do?

The usual answer is that such discussions improve the atmosphere—and this is not altogether wrong or useless. Clearly, there are some atmospheres that are more conducive to productive negotiations and others that are less so. But atmosphere is not substance. We must be on guard against that error to which democracies have long been subject: the error of mistaking atmosphere for substance. It is worth remembering that the atmosphere immediately following Neville Chamberlain's Munich meeting with Hitler in 1938 seemed very propitious; a more disastrous agreement was, however, never concluded.

Atmosphere is important, but quite secondary. Moreover, it is transitory: atmosphere comes and goes. What is more critical is the matter of miscalculation. One of the paramount tasks of diplomacy is to avoid miscalculation or, at least, to minimize the role played by miscalculation in world affairs. That was one key purpose of the Geneva meeting.

There are two kinds of miscalculation to be avoided. The first is a miscalculation of our intentions. For 40 years we have been assuring the Soviet Union of the peacefulness of our intentions, and I think there are many people who would argue that the Soviets have understood our basic attitude all along. But it never hurts to reaffirm what, for us, is a matter of principle and a fact of life.

Mr. Gorbachev expressed the concern that the Strategic Defense Initiative may be offensive in character, and President Reagan assured him that this was palpably not the case. As proof of our good faith, the President elaborated our "open laboratories" proposal—an initiative that would permit scientists of both countries to visit the laboratories where research on strategic defense is being conducted, to see with their own eyes that such research is defensive. This initiative, we feel, offers a kernel of trust around which a cooperative transition to a more defensive world might crystallize. We will have more to say about the proposal—and some interesting ideas here—in the coming weeks in Geneva.

The second, more important form of miscalculation to be avoided is miscalculation of our strength and our resolve. In this respect, the summit gave Mr. Gorbachev the opportunity to gauge the intensity of the President's conviction that Soviet aggression around the world will not pay and to perceive the intensity of the President's commitment to the Strategic Defense Initiative. The latter point has vast consequences for arms control.

Until recently, the Soviets have taken the position that no arms agreement would be possible unless the United States were unilaterally to abandon its research in strategic defenses. Indeed, they go so far as to deny that they are themselves engaged in such research, though proof to the contrary is unmistakable. So confident have they been in this tactic that, for months after the United States tabled its proposals on intermediate-range arms in Geneva, the Soviets did not ever bother to table their own proposals. Indeed, they were hardly negotiating at the conference table—they were too busy negotiating in the headlines.

It would seem that this Soviet position was based on the assumption—or at least the hope—that we might be prevailed upon to abandon *our* SDI—that, at bottom, we were not all that serious about strategic defense research. This, I think it is fair to say, is a bad miscalculation—a miscalculation that the Geneva meeting may have moved to dispel. Real progress will not be possible until the Soviets recognize that their sweeping and unverifiable demand for an end to U.S. research on strategic defense has not the slightest chance of being met. That's a fact. The sooner the Soviets grasp it, the sooner we can move out on arms control.

The Current Negotiations

There are signs—small signs, tentative signs—that this may already be happening, though we still have a long way to go. Nonetheless, at the summit conference, Mr. Gorbachev did seem to imply, in a new departure from the old Soviet position, that a new arms agreement might permit some U.S. intermediate-range systems to remain in Europe. He also suggested that an agreement on intermediate-range forces might be possible without direct linkage to space and strategic armaments. This constitutes progress, for it means that an agreement on intermediate-range missiles is no longer held hostage by the Soviets to an unverifiable ban on strategic defense research.

Now the same should apply to the START [strategic arms reduction talks] negotiations on long-range strategic systems—that these issues, too, can be considered on their own merits. Such would constitute a major step in the upcoming round IV and be a major move to open real progress. We hope the Soviets will move to such a position.

The Soviets have also said, again for the first time over the past months, that they accept our basic principle of deep cuts—beginning with 50% reductions, appropriately applied, in nuclear forces. This new departure comes with a twist; for there is a major discrepancy here between the headline message of public relations and the fine print of actual negotiations.

As anyone who has looked closely at the current Soviet proposals is aware, they are absurdly one-sided. They include as "strategic" a number of intermediate-range systems on our side, while excluding over 2,000 obviously comparable systems on the Soviet side. Thus, the new Soviet proposal includes all U.S. nuclear systems deployed to protect our allies in Europe and excludes all Soviet systems to threaten our allies—both in Europe and Asia. In particular, the Soviets' proposal attempts to include our so-called forward-based systems in Europe. This is a retrogressive step, which takes us back to 1970, when the Soviets tried to include "forward-based systems" in the SALT I talks.

Progress in SALT I, as the Soviets were well aware, hinged on moving beyond this one-sided position. To return now to the opening negotiating positions of 1970 tends to make mockery of the notion of "progress" in arms control, of the notion that we are in a position to build on past achievements. So there has been a large dose of propaganda and a correspondingly large dose of retrogression in recent Soviet proposals.

But the Soviets have made unreasonable demands before, and they have eventually abandoned them—once it became clear that such proposals have no chance of being met.

Take INF [intermediate-range nuclear forces], for example. In 1977, the Soviet Union began to deploy, unprovoked, a new generation of powerful intermediate-range missiles in Europe—the SS-20s. In 1979, NATO attempted to meet this threat with a "dual-track" decision to try to negotiate a new arms agreement and, if necessary, to deploy American Pershing and cruise missiles in response. While the NATO nations were debating this proposal, the Soviets said that if the dual-track decision were adopted, they would simply refuse to negotiate. The dual-track decision was adopted, and by June 1980, the Soviets had reversed themselves and had come to the negotiating table. In 1983, when the first American missiles were deployed in Europe, the Soviets left the table and declared they would never return so long as the missiles remained in Europe. Well, the missiles are in Europe, and they are back negotiating, even coming up with a proposal enabling us to keep some INF systems deployed in Europe.

Despite enormous pressures, we held firm on INF, insisting upon agreements that respected the needs of both sides. Indeed, arms control agreements must be good for each side or they are good for nothing. In the process, we proved the bond among NATO countries to be far stronger than many skeptics supposed. We also brought the Soviet Union back to the bargaining table. There is little doubt that the improvement in relations now is a reward for our resolution then.

Much of our current task in negotiations is to persuade the Soviets that their more one-sided and unreasonable proposals have no chance of being met. More than that, we must persuade them that they have nothing to gain by sticking to one-sided and unreasonable proposals, that they will not be rewarded in the West for taking such positions.

One form of reward is press and media coverage. If the Soviets know that they gain a page one story in the West and a spot on network news by advancing a completely unreasonable and one-sided position, they will be sorely tempted to do so. If, on the other hand, they understand that such propaganda maneuvers will be relegated to page 13, then the incentive to put such propagandistic proposals forward is weakened.

There is one other pitfall we must avoid—the perennial folly of assuming that unilateral concessions and restraints on our part will inspire reciprocal restraints on the Soviet side. This approach to arms control has a very bad record—the examples are too numerous to cite here. Unilateral cancellations on our part result in unilateral advantages on their part. Our capacity to assure our national security and to succeed on arms control is contingent upon, and underwritten by, our strength and resolve and by our ability to convey these to the Soviet leadership. Remove the threat of American force modernization, remove the advance of America's ability to deter and to seek new means of deterrence, and you have removed part of our safety and our incentive for arms control. If we show a lack of resolve, vacillation, and an unwillingness to stand firm on these key measures of will, the Soviets will not need bilateral arms control. They will be able to sit back and watch us unilaterally disarm ourselves. For they take such cancellations not as a sign of good will but as a sign of lack of will.

This is not a pleasant truth. It is not as pleasing as the quasi-Ghandian notion that our example of self-restraint will inspire corresponding self-restraint in Soviet leaders; but it is a fact of life. And what I say applies quite directly to the ASAT [anti-satellite systems] testing ban now enforced by Congress. Such bans have the effect simply of removing the incentive for negotiation of shrinking the realm in which the writ of arms control may run. They are bad for genuine arms control.

Verification and Soviet Treaty Violations

There is one final concern I wish to touch on, and that is the issue of verification and Soviet treaty violations. This continues to be a perplexing and frustrating topic. It is one of those curious questions in life on which a great many people seem somehow to suspend their common sense. Imaginative energies have been expended over the past several years in the service of exculpating Soviet violations of arms control treaties and commitments. Some of the arguments we hear are a testimony to the abiding role of absurdity in human life. As George Orwell once said, some things are so absurd only an intellectual could have thought of them.

We hear that we should not concern ourselves with the violations because they are not comprehensive. That is to say, we should not be concerned because, as yet, the Soviets have failed to violate *every* provision of the treaties. It is a statistical fact that only a tiny percentage of people in this country cheat on their income tax. It is also a fact that even these people seldom cheat on every provision of the tax code. But does anyone seriously suppose the government could forgo audits and penalties for income tax evasion—even of those who only evade a few provisions of the code—without a total breakdown of the system? Why should we have a lower standard of compliance in an area vital to our national security than we do in our own tax system?

We also hear that the arms control violations are not "serious." How serious do they have to be? The Soviets have built a new large phased-array radar in Siberia with a location and orientation explicitly forbidden by the ABM [Anti-Ballistic Missile] Treaty. Hundreds of hours were expended negotiating this treaty provision. Violation of this provision strikes at the heart of the ABM Treaty. The Soviets have tested and are now deploying a second new ballistic missile in violation of SALT II. What is SALT II's primary function other than to limit missiles? How serious do the violations have to be? Must we have a total debacle, must we have a total disaster on our hands, before anyone is roused to act? The fact is that violations of arms control treaties are likely to begin in small ways, just as festering wounds begin as small inflammations. Do we neglect to treat such wounds until there is evidence of gangrene—for fear that the antiseptic will sting?

The basic point is this. The Soviets, as good Marxist-Leninists, respect treaties only so long as they reflect the real relations of power in the world. Violations are a sign of declining respect—the surest sign we have that the arms control process is weakening, that it is losing out to more aggressive impulses. It is imperative, for the sake of arms control, that we make it clear to the Soviets that a record of strict and literal compliance is essential to continuation of the arms control process. If our message is to get through to Soviet leaders, it must have public support.

Conclusion

Arms control is never easy; it is never a risk-free business, especially for a democracy. One reason it is difficult is that it demands contradictory qualities: it demands that we keep realism and tough-mindedness alive amid hope. I sometimes think that nothing has proved so fatal to the arms control enterprise over the years as its moments of success—for precisely at such moments we are inclined to forget the safeguards, the caution, and the resolve necessary both to obtain and to preserve success.

At the present moment, we will be tempted to yield to optimism. But let us never forget that the preservation of optimism demands that we not be overcome by it, that we keep our wits about us, that in this new atmosphere of seeming amity, we keep alive the awareness of our principles and our strengths. ■

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